

HEATSTROKE or HEAT EXHAUSTION

(Sunstroke)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Illness caused by prolonged exposure to hot temperatures, limited fluid intake, or failure of temperature regulation mechanisms in the brain. It can affect all ages, but is more common in the elderly.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Heat exhaustion:

- Dizziness, fatigue, faintness, headache.
- Skin that is pale and clammy.
- Pulse rapid and weak.
- Breathing is fast and shallow.
- Muscle cramps.
- Intense thirst.

Heatstroke:

- Often preceded by heat exhaustion and its symptoms.
- Skin that is hot, dry and flushed.
- No sweating.
- High body temperature.
- Rapid heartbeat.
- Confusion.
- Loss of consciousness.

CAUSES

- Heat exhaustion is caused by insufficient water intake, insufficient salt intake, and a deficiency in the production of sweat. (Sweat evaporation is what helps to cool the body).
- Heat stroke is caused by overexposure to extreme heat and a breakdown in the body's heat-regulating mechanisms. The body becomes overheated to a dangerous degree (body temperature can reach 107° F).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- General effects of aging.
- Alcohol or other drug abuse.
- Chronic illness, such as diabetes or blood-vessel disease.
- Recent illness involving fluid loss from vomiting or diarrhea.
- Hot, humid weather.
- Working in a hot environment.
- Loss of body fluids from sweating and failure to drink enough replacement fluid.
- Heavy, restrictive clothing.
- Severe fever.
- Competitive or intense exercise in hot humid conditions.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing in hot weather.
- Drink water often, don't wait until thirsty.
- Drink extra water if you sweat heavily. If urine output decreases, increase your water intake.
- If you become overheated, improve your ventilation. Open a window or use a fan or air conditioner. This promotes sweat evaporation, which cools the skin.
- Acclimate yourself to hot weather.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Prompt treatment usually brings full recovery in 1 to 2 days.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Can involve any major organ system (heart, lungs, kidneys, brain).
- Related to duration and intensity of heat and to speed and effectiveness of treatment.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- If someone with symptoms is very hot and not sweating:
Cool the person rapidly. Remove their clothing, use a cold-water bath, or wrap in wet sheets. Arrange for transportation to the nearest hospital. This is an emergency!
- If someone is faint but sweating:
Lie the person down in a cool place, give them cool liquids (water, soft drinks or fruit juice). Arrange for transportation to the hospital, except in mild cases. Get medical advice for proper care.

MEDICATIONS

Medicine usually is not necessary for these disorders.

ACTIVITY

- Rest with legs elevated while symptoms are present.
- Activity may be resumed after symptoms improve.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has symptoms of heatstroke or heat exhaustion, or observe them in someone else. Call immediately! These conditions may be serious or fatal.